

Samuel Tilton House  
12 Sunnyside Place  
Newport  
Newport County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-309

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
45-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## SAMUEL TILTON HOUSE

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
45-

Location: 12 Sunnyside Place.

Present Owner: Michael R. Corcoran.

Present Occupants: Tenants.

Present Use: Rooming house.

Statement of Significance: This house is an outstanding early building of the architects McKim, Mead, and White. An example of their "Shingle Style" work, it is characterized by open planning and richly textured surfaces on the exterior and interior.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

The building is located in Plat 26, Lot 42. The following is an incomplete chain of title from Newport City Clerk's Records for the city of Newport. Reference is to number and volume of the Land Evidence Books, (LEB.--, p.--).

1880 Deed of July 13, 1880, recorded in LEB. 50, p. 543.

From: James L. Hazard and George A. Hazard  
To: Helen G. Tilton of Boston  
For: \$4000

"... a parcel... bounded Northerly on land of Margaret M. LaFarge one hundred and forty feet, Easterly on land formerly of Harriet Crowinshield, deceased, one hundred feet, Southerly on land of Philander Shaw one hundred forty feet, Westerly on a court or way called Sunnyside Place..."

1881 Deed of March 31, 1881, recorded in LEB. 51, p. 403.

From: Philander Shaw and Nancy W. Shaw, wife  
To: Helen G. Tilton, wife of Samuel

"... a parcel... bounded Westerly on Sunnyside Place one hundred feet, Northerly on land of Helen G. Tilton one hundred forty five feet, Easterly on land of the heirs-at-law of Harriet Crowinshield, deceased, one hundred feet, Southerly on land of Marcy G. Wilson and Anna M. Sessions one hundred forty five feet..."

1882 Deed of November 1, 1882, recorded in LEB. 49, p. 37.

From: Anna M. Sessions of Providence  
To: Helen G. Tilton  
For: \$3,200

"... all my undivided half interest... in a parcel... bounded... Westerly on Sunnyside Place seventy five 2/10 feet, Northerly by land now or formerly of Philander Shaw one hundred forty feet, Easterly by land now or formerly of Harriet Crowinshield, deceased, one hundred four 5/10 feet, and Southerly by land now or formerly of John G. Ladd one hundred forty two 6/10 feet..."

1883 Deed of April 23, 1883, recorded in LEB. 51, p. 265.

From: Samuel Coleman of New York  
To: Helen G. Tilton

"... the one undivided half interest... in a parcel... bounded Northerly seventy six 5/10 feet on land of the grantee, Easterly ninety one 1/10 feet on a lot of land the one undivided half interest in which this day conveyed by said Helen G. Tilton to this grantor, Southerly seventy eight feet on land of John W. Ladd, and Westerly seventy five feet 75/100 feet on Sunnyside Place. Being a portion of the same premises which were conveyed by Anna M. Sessions and Marcy G. Wilson..."

1883 Deed of April 23, 1883, recorded in LEB. 51, p. 263.

From: Samuel Tilton and Helen G. Tilton  
To: Samuel Coleman

"... the one undivided half interest in a parcel... bounded Northerly sixty five 2/10 feet by land of the grantors, Easterly one hundred four 25/100 feet by land of the grantee, Southerly sixty six 75/100 feet by land of John W. Ladd, and Westerly ninety one 1/10 feet on lot of land the one undivided half interest in which is this day conveyed by said grantee to said Helen G. Tilton..."

- 1883 Deed of December 19, 1883, recorded in LE8. 54, p. 341.  
From: George C. Mason  
To: Helen G. Tilton  
"... a small parcel, strip or gore of land lying across the Southerly end of Sunnyside Place... bounded... commencing at a point formed by the intersection of the Southern end of the Western side of Sunnyside Place with the Northern side of a lot of land belonging to William Edgar, and thence running Easterly, bounded Southerly partly on said Edgar land and partly on land now or formerly of John G. Ladd, to Western end of the Southern side of a lot of land belonging to said Helen G. Tilton, thence Northerly bounded Easterly on land of said Helen about ten feet more or less, and thence Westerly across Sunnyside Place to the point of beginning..."
- 1885 Deed of May 4, 1885, recorded in LEB. 49, p. 69.  
From: Samuel and Helen Tilton  
To: Grace Mary Tilton, daughter  
In addition to the above described properties, "... also all furniture and goods and chattels useful and ornamental contained... in the dwelling house..."
- 1888 Deed of May 19, 1888, recorded in LEB. 58, p. 581.  
From: Gustave Schirmer and Grace Mary Schirmer  
To: Walter Langdon
- 1896 Deed of January 28, 1896, recorded in LEB. 7D, p. 256.  
From: Walter Langdon, be executors  
To: Goodwin Hobbs
- 1946 Deed of August 8, 1946, recorded in LE8. 161, p. 407.  
From: Goodwin Hobbs  
To: Louis H. Hobbs
- 1957 Deed of December 18, 1957, recorded in LE8. 194, p. 633.  
From: Margherita Hobbs, widow of Eliot W. Hobbs  
To: Louis Hobbs
- 1969 Deed of May 16, 1969, recorded in LE8. 226, p. 559.

From: Louis H. Hobbs  
To: Michael R. Corcoran

2. Date of erection: 1881-1882
  3. Architect: McKim, Mead, and White
  4. Builder: Nathan Barker
  5. Original plans: None known
  6. Alterations and additions: None known
  7. Important old views: None known
- B. Historic Events Connected with the Structure:
- C. Sources of Information:
1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
Records of Deeds in Newport City Hall.
  2. Secondary and published sources:  
Downing, Antoinette F., and Scully Vincent J. Jr., The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, New York: Clarkson N. Potter, second edition, 1967.  
Moore, Charles, The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim, Boston: Houghton, 1929.  
Newport Mercury, May 14, 1881.
  3. Likely sources not yet investigated:  
Dissertation on McKim, Mead, and White, (in progress), University of Michigan, by Richard Wilson.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an example of the "Shingle Style" work of McKim, Mead, and White. It is characterized by open planning and richly textured surfaces on both the exterior and interior.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is structurally sound, and nearly unchanged. As a result, the decoration is in need of refurbishing which will present great difficulty, because of the intricacy of the detail.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 68 1/2 feet by 58 feet; irregular rectangle; 3 1/2 stories.
2. Foundations: The foundations are random ashlar.
3. Wall construction: The west and north walls are random ashlar and tan limestone with coal chips in the mortar. Each wall has a plaster panel decorated with broken bottle glass. The pattern of the glass fragments forms a shield motif on the west wall and a sunburst motif on the north wall. The remainder of the house is frame with shingles, or half-timber with boards and plaster.
4. Structural system: See above description.
5. Chimneys: The three brick chimneys have pilasters and plaster panels decorated with broken bottle glass.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The four foot wide Dutch entrance door is elaborately framed with small wood inlays. A kitchen door is located at the northeast corner in a small vestibule.
  - b. Windows: Most windows are double hung with small panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash.
7. Roof: The broad, intersecting, gable roofs have simple box eaves at the lower edges. The raking edges of the gable roofs do not have projecting eaves.
8. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: The entrance porch has a deck on top that is reached from the northwest corner bedroom. There is a small two story porch on the south side of the house. The parlor, dining room and studio open to the porch.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The entrance on the west leads to a large stairhall at the northwest corner of the house. The parlor, dining room and studio are ranged from west to east along the south side. The kitchen at the northeast corner completes the plan of the first floor. The second floor has three principal bedrooms opening off a center hall to the northwest, the southwest and south, each with fire-

place and built-in cupboards. The balconies off the northwest and south bedrooms are reached through double hung windows. The lower sash of the windows continues to the floor. The second floor has a fourth, small bedroom to the northeast, and a bathroom on the east side. The third floor is divided into two small simple bedrooms, one large bedroom, and a bathroom. The larger bedroom has a fireplace. A passageway from the large bedroom leads down several steps to a large room over the studio. There are three very small bedrooms on the fourth floor. Only the room under the studio in the cellar is finished.

2. Stairways: The main stairway with a broad eight foot wide first run leads from the entrance hall to the center hall of the second floor. At the landing a large window of various sized panes provides light to the entrance hall. An arch and screen of elaborate spindle work separate the stairway from the entrance hall. The square, plain surfaced newels are contrasted by turned balusters. The east wall of the stair well is covered with basket weave paneling which has a sunburst motif in the center. The back stairway continues from the cellar to the fourth floor.
3. Flooring: The house has oak flooring 2 1/2 inches wide.
4. Wall and ceiling finish and interior detail: The entrance hall and the three principal rooms have elaborate decoration, generally light in scale with intricately patterned surfaces of a dark color.

Entrance Hall: The south wall has an elaborate fireplace with a pale orange marble facing, a marble shelf, with a mirror above. This composition is framed by slender colonettes. The other wall surfaces are panelled in dark, unfinished wood with either vertical combed surfaces or smooth surfaces with occasional insets of spindle work in rosette patterns. The panelling is seven feet high, finished with a cornice which runs around the room, leaving a band of wall sixteen inches wide to the ceiling. The cupboards along the north wall are framed as a part of the wall panelling. The stairway and the window north of the entrance door are screened with spindle work. The plaster ceiling is divided into panels by wood strips and framed with a denticulated cornice. Brass hinges and escutcheons with nail stud patterns are prominent decorative features. The edges and corners of the woodwork are emphasized by small scale, finely carved patterns, guilloche, fish scale, etc. The window south of the entrance door is filled with small panes of colored glass, square and round bottle glass.

Parlor: The parlor, at the southwest corner of the house, is reached through a six foot wide door at the right of the entrance hall. The elaborate fireplace composition is located on the north wall. The center opening with a marble facing is capped by a heavy mantel shelf carved with stylized leaf patterns similar to those in the reeded cornice above. The reeded wood overmantel has a large enframed oval mirror with four small circular enframed mirrors at the corners. The composition is flanked by built-in cupboards topped by niches with shell hoods. The cupboards have brass hinges and escutcheons. Built-in wood seats project from the fireplace wall and enframe the tile hearth. The built-in shelf work on the west wall suggests oriental designs. The south wall contains a group of three double hung windows with small panes of leaded glass in the upper sashes. The remaining plaster walls are covered with a textured wallpaper, originally a greenish gold color. The ceiling has been covered with beaver board.

Dining Room: Located at the center of the south side, it connects with the parlor, the entrance hall, the pantry, and the studio. The walls are panelled in dark wood. The north wall contains a built-in buffet with brass hinges and drawer pulls. The composition is topped by a decorative screen of elaborate spindle work. The east wall contains a built-in cupboard to the left of the fireplace and hearth. The plaster ceiling is painted a dark blue green. An open woven fabric of chair reeding covers this ceiling. Due to water damage, it is in need of repair.

Studio: The studio, at the southeast corner of the house, is entered through wide sliding double doors from the dining room. The doorway is divided by a pair of columns carved with a fish scale pattern. The room has a high wall cornice with wood panelling below and plaster wall above. A large window seat on the south wall is recessed within a frame of spindle work. A fireplace is set in one diagonal face of the polygonal north end of the room. The beamed ceiling is painted in greens and gold with a starry sky pattern.

Kitchen: The kitchen, at the northeast corner of the house, communicates with the dining room through a butler's pantry which is also accessible from the entrance hall. The kitchen contains a coal cooking stove and built-in cupboards. The pantry has glass front cupboards and counters with shelves below.

5. Lighting: Original fixtures remain in the parlor, dining



room, and studio.

6. Heating: There is a modern heating system with radiators.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west to Sunnyside Place, with a large sloping yard to the south.
2. Historic landscape design: The landscaping is informal with lawn and large trees.
3. Outbuildings: There is a later garage at the southwest corner of the property.
4. Walks: Gravel walks lead from Sunnyside Place to the front and rear entrances.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project -- 1969. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Osmund Overby, (University of Missouri), Project Supervisor, Jack E. Boucher, photographer.